

Fritz Fischer

## GERMANY AND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

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*Professor of History at Hamburg University, Fischer's main concern in his book, Germany's Aims in the First World War, is to show that Germany was pursuing an aggressive policy, inspired by economic interests and designed to achieve world power. He begins with a chapter on German policy from about 1900 to 1914, then in chapter 2, reprinted below, he examines the July crisis of 1914 before launching into the aims of the war period. In his view there is a continuity in German objectives from 1900 to the Second World War, although the link between the first and second wars is implied rather than spelled out. The English-language text was reduced by the author himself by about a third from the third edition of the German work. As Imanuel Geiss, one of his students, has pointed out, Fischer not only questioned the taboo of German innocence, built up in Germany over live decades, but also broke the monopoly of knowledge that conservative German historians had held by "just picking up Albertini and reading the documents published since 1919." Furthermore, his book helped to divert attention from purely diplomatic to economic considerations.*

In spite of all the surface calm, the feeling, or conviction, that a great European conflict could not be long postponed had become general in Europe. Germany found herself, as Moltke put it, "in a condition of hopeless isolation which was growing ever more hopeless." Her confidence in the invincibility of her military strength had been deeply shaken by the increases in the French and Russian armies (of which the latter would in 1917 reach its maximum peacetime strength of 2 million men), and the idea of a "preventive war" was acquiring an increasing appeal, especially in military circles. "We are ready, and the sooner it comes, the better for us," said Moltke on June 1, 1914. At about the same time, Moltke asked Jagow to precipitate a preventive war as soon as possible. Jagow refused, but admitted later that he had never wholly excluded the idea of a preventive war and that Moltke's words had influenced him during the crisis of July-August 1914. Another element of danger was the fact that Conservative circles had come, especially since the Reichstag elections of 1912, to regard war as a "tempering of the nation" and calculated to strengthen the Prusso-German state. Bethmann Hollweg, who in December, 1913, had already rejected the suggestion passed on to him by the crown prince, and emanating from the pan-Germans, that a coup d'etat should be carried out against the Social Democrats, spoke out again just six months later against these speculations on the internal political consequences of a war. He told Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian minister, at the beginning of June, 1914, that:

*There were still circles in the Reich which looked to war to bring about an improvement, in the conservative sense, of internal conditions in Germany. He thought that the effects would be the exact opposite; a world war, with its incalculable consequences, would greatly increase the power of Social Democracy, because it had preached peace, and would bring down many a throne.*

A month later the Chancellor agreed on foreign-political and military grounds to take the risk of a great war, while recognizing - unlike the Conservatives - that the war could not be carried on without the cooperation of Social Democracy.

### **Sarajevo, the Hoyos Mission and Germany's Blank Cheque**

The news of the murder of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne evoked indignation and consternation throughout Europe, but there was no feeling that it must inevitably lead to a European crisis. The reactions were mixed in the Monarchy itself. There was genuine mourning; but a close observer could not fail to note that wide circles in the Monarchy felt undisguised relief at the death of the man who meant to put through some sort of trialist or federalist reorganization of the Monarchy favourable to its Slavonic elements. Besides the Germans and Magyars, who had felt their dominating positions threatened by Franz Ferdinand,

and besides the Emperor Franz Joseph, who had never forgiven his nephew his morganatic marriage, there was also a third group in the Monarchy who welcomed the archduke's death, because they saw in it an opportunity to settle accounts once and for all with Serbia by a war in which Germany would be behind them. The spokesman of this group was Baron Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff.

Although since 1912 Conrad had described the idea of a military reckoning with Serbia as a *va banque* gamble (a gamble that risks everything), if it had to be risked without the support of Rumania - on which he had counted confidently in 1905 - and with a stronger Russia, only a few days after the murder he thought that the conflict with Serbia, bad as its prospects were, could no longer be avoided, and immediately the news reached him he told the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Berchtold, that Austria should mobilize; she should "cut through the knot," or her prestige would be gone forever and her position among the great powers be irretrievably lost. But even this thruster, when he tried to persuade the hesitant diplomats, Berchtold and his assistant, Forgach, to adopt the military solution, was not willing to risk war without a firm promise of help from Germany. The Emperor was for taking the risk. Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, was more doubtful than Berchtold himself; the political situation was unfavourable, Russia too strong, public opinion unprepared. The final decision thus depended on Germany's attitude. Both the German ambassador in Vienna, von Tschirschky, and Zimmermann, the Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Ministry (Jagow, his chief, was away on his honeymoon), were at first very reserved and counselled moderation.

But this policy of hesitancy was abruptly altered by Wilhelm II, who was outraged that the ambassador should take so much upon himself. By July 4 the Emperor was all for "settling accounts with Serbia." "Tschirschky will be so good as to drop this nonsense. We must finish with the Serbs, quickly." With his famous words "now or never" the Emperor laid down the general course of Germany's policy for the next weeks. From that hour Tschirschky and Zimmermann were among the most decided advocates of a hard policy towards Serbia.

This reversal of attitude came as no surprise to Austria-Hungary. On July 1 the German publicist Victor Naumann, a confidant of the German Foreign Ministry, had been in Vienna and had talked to Count Hoyos, the permanent head of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry, to whom he had given an illuminating sketch of the mentality then prevailing in leading political circles of Germany. The conversation was afterwards officially described as having been purely private; what made it so important was that Germany's actual behaviour in the July crisis exactly confirmed Naumann's prophecies. The heads of the services thought the Triple Alliance "not strong enough at present," but the adherents of the idea of a preventive war were growing steadily, both in the army and navy, and in the Foreign Ministry. This "idea" was also supported by a second consideration. It was hoped that the Anglo-German settlement in Africa had "made it certain that Britain would not intervene in a European war." Naumann openly counselled military action against Serbia. The Triple Alliance was strong, Britain would be neutral. The Foreign Ministry, as he knew from von Stumm, would certainly not oppose it, and - the fourth favourable factor - the Emperor would not shrink from war, as he had in the Moroccan crises. Moreover, public opinion would force the Foreign Ministry to let things take their course.

On July 4 the Austrian Foreign Ministry had been unofficially informed by Tschirschky, through an *homme de confiance* (a man of confidence or a right-hand-man) of the German embassy, that "Germany would support the Monarchy through thick and thin, whatever action it decided to take against Serbia. The sooner Austria-Hungary struck, the better."

Since Conrad's plans for war against Serbia were dependent on Germany's support, the first essential for Vienna was to secure official information on Germany's definitive intentions. Count Hoyos was sent to Berlin to obtain this. On July 5 he handed Szögyény, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, two documents: a memorandum, compiled by Tisza, on the situation of the Monarchy, coupled with a proposal that advantage should be taken of the Serbian question to attach Bulgaria to the Triple Alliance, and a letter in Franz Joseph's own hand to the effect that the only way of saving the Monarchy from being swallowed up in the "Pan-Slav flood" was "to eliminate Serbia, which at present constitutes the corner-stone of pan-Slav

policy," as a political power-factor in the Balkans. Szögyény handed the two documents to the Emperor the same day. At first the Emperor evaded taking a decision, but after lunch, to which he had invited Szögyény in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, he authorized him to inform his monarch that Austria-Hungary could "count on Germany's full support" even in the case of "grave European complications"; Germany, "loyal as ever to her ally," would stand by Austria even should the Serbian conflict lead to war between Austria and Russia. Wilhelm even told the ambassador that if Vienna should decide on military action against Serbia, she ought to march at once. He thought that he could himself dispel Austria's anxieties about Rumania's attitude by a personal intervention with King Carol. At the same time he told Szögyény what had been the chief consideration that had made it so easy for him to decide to support Austria-Hungary: "In any case, as things stood today, Russia was not at all ready for war, and would certainly think long before appealing to arms."

This was, as we shall see, one of the basic assumptions of German policy in these weeks: that Russia and France were still militarily weak enough to enable Germany to weather the crisis, however it developed.

When the audience was over, Szögyény was able on the same day to pass this "blank cheque" of the German Emperor to Vienna, and to report that Wilhelm II "would regret it if we (Austria-Hungary) let this present chance, which was so favourable for us, go by without utilizing it." The Emperor had indeed made the reservation, which the constitution imposed on him, that he must get the Imperial Chancellor's consent, but he had had no doubt, as he had expressly emphasized, that Bethmann Hollweg "would entirely agree with him."

This was exactly what happened. Bethmann Hollweg and Zimmermann were summoned to Potsdam the same afternoon, and to them the Emperor unfolded the same train of thought he had to Szögyény; and, as Wilhelm expected, Bethmann Hollweg, who did not yet know the exact text of the Austrian memorandum, agreed completely with his Imperial master. The Minister of War, von Falkenhayn, the Adjutant General, von Plessen, the Head of the Military Cabinet, von Lyncker, Captain Zenker of the naval staff, and Admiral von Capelle, representing von Tirpitz, were now successively called into the presence, and the question of "preparatory measures for war" was discussed with them on the evening of the 5th and the following morning, so as "to cover every case" before the Emperor left for Kiel to start his regular North Sea cruise. The question "whether the army was ready for any eventuality" was answered by von Falkenhayn with "a curt affirmative." On July 17 Major-General Count Waldersee, Quartermaster General in the general staff, who was then in the country, wrote to von Jagow in strict confidence: "I can move at a moment's notice. We in the general staff are ready; there is nothing more for us to do at this juncture." For the same reason Helmuth Count von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff, who had been informed by von Falkenhayn of the consultation of July 5 and by Lieutenant-Colonel Tappen of the Potsdam decision, found it unnecessary to leave Karlsbad. How strongly the Emperor's decision had been influenced by his faith in the strength of Germany's military forces is shown by what he said on July 6 to Capelle and Lieutenant-General Bertram of the general staff: France and Russia were not ready for war; he did not believe in a general war, but thought that now the army had been brought up to its present strength, and with Germany's superiority in heavy artillery, he could regard the outcome of a war with confidence (the campaign in the west was expected to last 5-6 weeks). So, too, Waldersee said: "The plans for mobilization had been duly completed on March 31, 1914; the army was ready, as always."

"In order," as he said himself, "not to alarm world opinion," the Emperor, after making all necessary dispositions, left for his North Sea cruise. He did so in full awareness of the import of the assurances which he had given to Austria. Shortly after, when he was in the company of Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach (a major industrialist in Germany), with whom he was on terms of intimacy, he assured him that:

*He would declare war at once, if Russia mobilized. This time people would see that he was not "falling out." The Emperor's repeated protestations that in this case no one would ever again be able to reproach him with indecision were almost comic to hear.*

To understand the Emperor's insistence, we must remember the criticisms of his attitude made by the military during the Morocco crisis of 1911, and the *Aldeutsche* (Pan-German) threat that if he again showed weakness, he would be deposed and replaced by the Crown Prince.

While his imperial master was boarding the train for Kiel, Bethmann Hollweg, with Zimmermann in attendance, formally confirmed to Hoyos and Szögyény the Emperor's decision of the previous day. This gave constitutional cover to the "blank cheque." The Chancellor left it to Austria to take the final decision but, like Wilhelm II, advised her to act at once, without informing Italy and Rumania; and like the Emperor, he justified his course by appeal to the favourable international situation. Szögyény had been prepared for this communication by the Emperor; Hoyos by Zimmermann, with whom he had talked on the 5th. Hoyos had wanted military action against Serbia "*sans crier gare*," ("without warning"), and Zimmermann had given him to understand that if Austria acted against Serbia at once, Russia and France would keep clear of the conflict. Any doubts or hesitations in Austria were removed when, on the 7th, Hoyos brought back Germany's unconditional promise to stand by Austria even if "measures against Serbia (which, Hoyos reported, Germany advised) should bring about the big war." The conditions for Conrad's plan were fulfilled.

A shift in the Hungarian Prime Minister's Austro-Hungarian policy came at a meeting of the Ministerial Council on July 7. All the participants except Tisza, who was still opposed to it, agreed on the necessity of war against Serbia, either by a direct attack without previous warning or by the presentation of an ultimatum with unacceptable demands which would equally lead to war. How strongly the decisions of the Council were influenced by the attitude of the Emperor and the German military is apparent from the answer given to Tisza by the Austrian Prime Minister, Count Stürgkh, who feared that "a policy of hesitation and weakness" would lose Austria Germany's support thereafter. When reporting to Franz Joseph two days later, Berchtold advised the ultimatum procedure, which would avoid "the odium of attacking Serbia without warning, put her in the wrong," and thus make it much easier for Rumania and Britain to preserve "at least [sic] neutrality." That he counted on the possibility of war with France and Russia is shown by the "long debate on the relative forces and the probable course of a European [sic] war" which we know from Hoyos' report and Conrad's notes to have taken place, although it was regarded as "not suitable for minuting."

Tisza, who on July 8 had still objected that an attack by Austria on Serbia would lead to "intervention by Russia and consequently world [sic] war," had, like Franz Joseph, been convinced by Germany's "unconditional attitude" that "the Monarchy had to reach an energetic conclusion." (When Tschirschky reported this, Wilhelm II added "certainly.") On the 14th Tschirschky was able to report that Tisza himself, the one opponent of war with "Serbia," had now agreed to a note "which would almost certainly be rejected (doubly underlined by Wilhelm II) and should result in war." So the first decision had been taken. That Germany faced the prospect of a general conflagration with open eyes emerges further from an instruction drafted by Radowitz, a Counsellor in the Foreign Ministry, as early as July 7 and sent by Jagow to Lichnowsky in London on the 14th. Jagow warned the ambassador of the possibility of "general complications"; Germany wished to localize the Austro-Serbian conflict, but not to prevent it. On the contrary, Lichnowsky was instructed to mobilize the British press against Serbia, although he must be careful not to give the impression "that we were egging Austria on to war." This epitomized German policy after the Hoyos mission. When Tschirschky had reported on July 10 that Berchtold was now in favour of "unacceptable demands," but that her "chief care" would now be how to put these demands, the Emperor commented: "They had time enough for that," and further made a suggestion which he thought bound to succeed: "Evacuation of the Sanjak! Then the cat is among the pigeons at once!"

### **German Pressure on Vienna**

The mouthpiece in Vienna of Germany's pressure was her ambassador, Tschirschky, who from July 7 onwards was holding almost daily discussions with the Ballhausplatz (Austro-Hungarian Government), on the proposed action against Serbia. Tschirschky also attended the most important conferences between the Austrians, so that Vienna's decisions were taken, literally, under his eyes.

After Austria had made up her mind to solve the Serbian question by war, Tschirschky called on Berchtold on July 8 to give him another message from the Emperor, who wanted it "stated most emphatically that Berlin expected the Monarchy to act against Serbia, and that Germany would not understand it if... the present opportunity were allowed to go by... without a blow struck."

As Berchtold reported, Tschirschky confirmed Stürgkh's fears that hesitation by the Monarchy would destroy her value as an ally in Germany's eyes. There was an implicit threat in his words when he told Berchtold "that if we compromised or bargained with Serbia. Germany would interpret this as a confession of weakness, which could not be without effect on our position in the Triple Alliance and on Germany's future policy." Tschirschky's influence can already be traced in Berchtold's audience with the Emperor Franz Joseph on July 9, for the Emperor consented to the minister's proposed action on the ground that he feared "that a weak attitude would discredit our position in Germany's eyes."

On July 11 Tschirschky, as he told Jagow in a strictly confidential private letter, "again took the occasion to discuss with Berchtold what action was to be taken against Serbia, chiefly in order to assure the minister once again, emphatically, that speedy action was called for."

The report by Berchtold on his interview with Tschirschky is supplemented and confirmed by a letter of July 12 from Szögyény. If it were possible a priori (without factual support) to think that Berchtold had invented his story of Tschirschky's pressure - the archives contain no telegram from Tschirschky confirming it - this suggestion would have to be dismissed in the light of the Emperor's marginal notes and Szögyény's dispatch. Szögyény fully confirmed Tschirschky's attitude. Germany, he wrote, Emperor and Chancellor alike, were pressing most vigorously for Austria to take immediate military action against Serbia. Szögyény believed that this "absolute" insistence on war against Serbia was based on the two considerations already mentioned: firstly, that Russia and France "were not yet ready" and, secondly, that Britain

*will not at this juncture intervene in a war which breaks out over a Balkan state, even if this should lead to a conflict with Russia, possibly also France .... Not only have Anglo-German relations so improved that Germany feels that she need no longer fear a directly hostile attitude by Britain, but above all, Britain at this moment is anything but anxious for war, and has no wish whatever to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Serbia, or in the last instance, for Russia.*

Szögyény accordingly summarized his own views and those of Berlin in the following conclusion: "In general, then, it appears from all this that the political constellation is as favourable for us as it could possibly be." On the 13th Tschirschky was able to report: "Minister (Berchtold) is now himself convinced that immediate action called for." Wilhelm II received this communication (which he again underlined doubly) with obvious relief.

The other way in which Germany was exerting pressure on Austria was by insisting that the ultimatum to Serbia should be couched in terms so strong as to make acceptance impossible; here too the Emperor had given the cue on July 6, and here again his lieutenants followed his lead. As early as July 12 Germany was informed of the contents of the Austrian note, and agreed that it should be delivered about July 25, after Poincaré had left Petersburg. "What a pity!" was the Emperor's comment on the lateness of the date.

Yet although Tisza had consented to military action - he expressly emphasized that it was Germany's attitude that had decided him - Vienna was still uncertain how sharp to make her demands on Serbia. The Austrians had decided to make the ultimatum unacceptable, yet when Berchtold talked on July 17 to Prince Stolberg, Counsellor at the German embassy, he spoke as though it was not yet quite certain whether Serbia would not after all accept the ultimatum. Stolberg reported to Bethmann Hollweg that he had had difficulty in concealing his displeasure at this hint that Austria might weaken. His report continued:

*If Austria really wants to clear up her relationship with Serbia once and for all, which Tisza himself in his recent speech called "indispensable," then it would pass comprehension why such demands were not being made as would make the breach unavoidable. If the action simply peters out, once again, and ends with a so-called diplomatic success, the belief which is already widely held here that the Monarchy is no longer capable of vigorous action will be dangerously strengthened. The consequences, internal and external, which would result from this, inside Austria and abroad, are obvious.*

Jagow expressed the same train of thought the next day in a long private letter to Lichnowsky. He was trying to answer the indirect warning which Grey had conveyed to Lichnowsky on July 9, that Britain would never take the side of an aggressor, by explaining why Germany thought sharp action by Austria against Serbia indispensable. First, he argued, war against Serbia was the Monarchy's last chance of "political rehabilitation," for the Monarchy already "hardly counted any more as a real great power." "This decline in Austria's power position," he went on, "has also greatly weakened our group of allies"; this was why he did not want, under any circumstances, to stop Austria from acting. He did not want to force a preventive war, but should war come, he would not "jib at the post," since Germany was militarily ready and Russia "fundamentally was not." The struggle between Teuton and Slav was bound to come (a thought which often reappeared in Jagow's utterances at critical junctures during the war); which being so, the present was the best moment for Germany, for "in a few years Russia ... will be ready. Then she will crush us on land by weight of numbers, and she will have her Baltic fleet and her strategic railways ready. Our group meanwhile is getting steadily weaker."

The argument that Germany was ready while Russia was not yet ready to strike, was especially emphasized by "German industrialists who specialize in armaments manufacture." Beyens, the Belgian ambassador in Berlin, reported that Krupp had assured him that "the Russian artillery was far from being either good or complete, while the German had never been better."

The Emperor, Bethmann Hollweg, Jagow and Zimmermann were all convinced of Germany's military superiority; so was the general staff. Count Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian minister in Berlin, reported at the end of July that Moltke had said that "a moment so favourable from the military point of view might never occur again." The reasons given by Lerchenfeld - which, he wrote, were by no means to be dismissed as "gossip between underlings" - were the familiar ones: superiority of German artillery and infantry rifle, insufficient training of the French army owing to the transition from the two to three years' term of service, the harvest in, and the training of the German first-line classes complete. For these reasons the politicians - Jagow, for example - could face the possibility of a European war with confidence: "If the conflict cannot be localized, and Russia attacks Austria-Hungary, this gives the *casus foederis* (case of alliance - a situation requiring alliance partners to support each other)."

If we study, the documents and the political moves, Jagow's letter of July 18 to Lichnowsky puts Germany's attitude, and also the reasons for it, in a nutshell. It is impossible to speak seriously either of Germany's being "towed along in Austria's wake" or of her being "coerced." From the Emperor's first intervention in the Serbian question on July 4 to July 18, German policy followed an unbroken line, as nothing proves better than the constant assurances by Vienna that Berlin could rely on Austria-Hungary's willingness to fight - that there was "no question" of indecision or hesitation. But Germany's own aims were even plainer: if France proved too weak, militarily and financially, to support Russia, Bethmann Hollweg - so he hinted to Count Roedern, Secretary of State for Alsace-Lorraine and later of the German Treasury, on July 16 - hoped at least to be able to divide France from Russia. Germany did not care so much what happened over Serbia; the central objective of her diplomacy in these weeks was to split the Entente, and this Bethmann Hollweg meant to enforce at any price, with or without war. In any case the Serbian crisis would bring about a regrouping of continental power relationships in a sense favourable to Germany and without intervention by Britain. The conflict must be localized, the great powers should "watch without acting," and Germany hoped to bring about a new grouping of forces in both the Balkans and the Mediterranean.

The German government, as Jagow informed Jules Cambon and Bronewski, the French ambassador and Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Berlin, on July 21, had no official information on Austria's aims or on its note. The Foreign Ministry, however, "entirely agreed that Austria must take advantage of the favourable moment, even at the risk of further complications," but both Jagow and Zimmermann, in obvious displeasure at Austria's weakness, doubted "whether Vienna would nerve herself to act." Zimmermann went so far as to transfer the description of "the sick man of Europe" from Turkey to Austria.

Berchtold confirmed the "nervousness" of the German statesmen. "Already," he wrote, "Berlin is beginning to get nervous." Reports were trickling through that Austria had hesitated too long before acting, and Zimmermann thought that "he had gathered the impression that Vienna, timid and undecided as it always

was, was almost sorry"(!) that Germany was not pressing caution and moderation on her. Berchtold was pressing for action now. Conrad was urging "haste," and the Minister of War, Baron von Krobatin, said that "everything was ready for mobilization." The reason for haste was to prevent Serbia from "smelling a rat" and "herself volunteering compensation, perhaps under pressure from France and Russia." If that happened, then as Germany saw it, Austria-Hungary's reason for war against Serbia would vanish; but with it Germany would lose her minimum objective of a diplomatic victory, a major political success.

### **The Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia**

After prolonged internal argument, the Austro-Hungarian Ministerial Council in Vienna decided on the final text of the ultimatum on July 19 and fixed the 23rd as the day for its delivery; both the Austrians and the Germans thought it prudent to wait until Poincaré and Viviani had left Petersburg, and thus prevent the French and Russians from agreeing immediately on their counter-measures. So active was the part played by Germany in the events of these days, so strong her influence over Austria-Hungary's policy, that Jagow actually had the time of the note's delivery on the 23rd put back an hour in order to make quite sure that the ship carrying the French statesmen had left Petersburg. The text of the note (the substance of which had been communicated to Germany on July 12) was conveyed by Tschirschky to the Foreign Ministry on the 22nd. If, as is often suggested, the Chancellor, Jagow or Zimmermann had found its wording too strong, they had time enough (from the evening of the 22nd to 6 p.m. on the 23rd) to protest against its presentation in that form. On the contrary: as late as July 18 Count Hoyos had reassured Prince Stolberg that the demands contained in the ultimatum "were really such as to make it really impossible" for the Serbian government to accept them with honour. As late as the 21st July Jagow had again assured Szögyény that Germany would stand behind Austria "unreservedly and with all her power." When he said that it was "vitally necessary" for Germany to know what Austria's plans for Serbia were, this was not out of any qualms about Austria's intentions, but because she wished, as Jagow put it to Tschirschky on the 17th, "to avoid giving any impression that we were wanting to impede Austria's actions, or to prescribe certain limitations or ends to her."

Now Germany waited for the presentation of the ultimatum.

The day before this was due, the purpose of the travelling about, of the "holiday spirit" of the military and political leaders of both Germany and Austria-Hungary, and of the efforts to keep the "Sarajevo spirit" alive, without, as Berchtold said, "making other powers begin thinking about mediation," became very plain. Vienna thought this the best way of keeping the Serbian action isolated. Germany, too, as Schoen, the Bavarian chargé d'affaires, told Munich (while passing on the three chief points of the ultimatum) wanted to make it look as though she was not a party to, or even informed about, what Vienna was doing...

As early as July 21, Bethmann Hollweg and Jagow opened the official moves to localize the conflict with a circular dispatch. Even before the ultimatum had been presented, Berlin was instructing its embassies in Petersburg, Paris and London to support Austria's action, and was undisguisedly threatening the European powers with a major conflict if the Serbian question were not confined to Serbia and Austria. Austria's attitude, which had not yet been announced (it was only the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung's* communiqué of the 19th which revealed to France the possibility of a major conflict), was "regarded as equitable and moderate," and Jagow now brought the whole discussion between Germany and Austria, including the underlying purposes, before the international forum in the following words:

*If the Austro-Hungarian government is not going to abdicate forever as a great power, she has no choice but to enforce acceptance by the Serbian government of her demands by strong pressure and, if necessary, by resort to military measures. The choice of methods must be left to her.*

On the 23rd, however, Jagow realized that this dispatch was not easy to reconcile with the story that Germany had been "surprised" by Austria's action. A second dispatch, drafted by Stumm, was hurriedly sent after the first instructing the ambassadors not to make their *démarches* (moves) until the text of the ultimatum had been published: "otherwise the impression might be given that we had foreknowledge of it." The dispatch required the great powers to abstain from any intervention in the Austro-Serbian conflict, even

threatening "incalculable consequences" if the warning were disregarded. This demand by Germany for a free hand for Austria surprised and displeased Grey, who did not believe that a war could be localized. In Germany, on the other hand, the conviction that Britain would stand aside from a European conflict was so firmly rooted that when Pourtalès, the German ambassador in Petersburg, reported Sazonov having told him that Britain would disapprove deeply of Austria's conduct, the Emperor wrote in the margin: "He's wrong"; and on Sazonov's warning that he must "reckon with Europe" in case of an attack on Serbia he commented: "No! Russia, yes!"

Yet, as innumerable documents show, Germany knew that Russia would never allow Austria-Hungary to act in the Balkans unopposed. She took the risk of war with open eyes. This is confirmed by the preparations taken by Germany when the ultimatum was presented to Serbia. Jagow, for example, asked for the exact itinerary of the imperial yacht, because:

*Since we want to localize the conflict between Austria and Serbia, we must not have the world alarmed by His Majesty's returning prematurely; on the other hand, His Majesty must be within reach, in case unpredictable developments should force us to take important decisions, such as mobilization. His Majesty might perhaps spend the last days of his cruise in the Baltic.*

On July 20 the Directors General of the Hapag and the Norddeutscher Lloyd were, on the Emperor's suggestion and with the Chancellor's consent, given warning by Jagow of the impending ultimatum, so that they could take measures for the protection of their vessels in foreign waters. On the same day the Emperor ordered the concentration of the fleet.

Even before that 6 p.m. of July 23, 1914, when Baron Giesl, the Austrian minister in Belgrade, presented the ultimatum, the coming of war was assumed. On July 18 Count Hoyos had "comforted" Prince Stolberg with the assurance "that the demands (contained in the ultimatum) were really such as to make it really impossible for a state with any self-respect and dignity to accept them. "

Thus only unconditional acceptance by Serbia of the ultimatum could have averted war, and on July 22 Vienna asked Berlin how the declaration of war was to be effected, as Austria wanted her own answer to the rejection to consist of the rupture of diplomatic relations and the recall of her minister. She suggested that Germany might transmit the declaration of war. Jagow refused, saying that it would look too much "as though we had been egging Austria on to make war."

### **The "No" to British Mediation**

The publication of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia evoked worldwide consternation except in Germany, where it was, in general, approved. The suspicion was often expressed that Germany was behind Austria's action, or at least privy to it. This suspicion was, as the German documents prove, completely justified, but Zimmermann denied it, as planned, in a telegram sent on the 24th to the German embassies in Paris, London and Petersburg. He asserted that Germany "had exercised no influence on the contents of the note" and had had "no more opportunity than any other power to take up any attitude towards it before its publication." The previous day Jagow had informed the Emperor that Grey had made his first attempt at mediation, suggesting to Lichnowsky that Britain should urge Russia to influence Serbia, and Germany to influence Austria-Hungary. The minutes with which the Emperor studied Lichnowsky's dispatch, which Jagow forwarded to him, show what he wanted quite clearly. His pent-up rage vented itself: Britain's "condescending orders" were to be rejected, and so was Grey's proposal that Vienna should retract any "impossible demands." "Am I to do that? Wouldn't think of it! What does he mean by 'impossible'? These fellows [the Serbs] have been intriguing and murdering, and they must be taken down a peg." He gave emphatic backing to the instructions from the Foreign Ministry which Jagow had sent to Lichnowsky "for guidance in your conversations." These show once more the consistency and purposefulness of German policy in July 1914. The ambassador was told that "we did not know what Austria was going to demand, but regarded the question as an internal affair of Austria-Hungary, in which we had no standing to intervene."



As Sazonov had prophesied, the effect of the ultimatum on London was "absolutely annihilating." Lichnowsky reported that Britain believed that Germany, for all her protestations of innocence, was at least "morally an accomplice," and he went on to warn: "If we do not join in the mediation, all faith here in us and in our love of peace will be finally shattered." Germany, however, made no more than a pretence of supporting the vigorous action for mediation now initiated by Britain; indeed, in order to prevent the possibility of mediation, she actually sabotaged the proposals put forward by Britain between July 24 and the declaration of war. Her actions, and her motives, can be clearly followed, day by day, in the dispatches.

As early as July 24 Grey, alarmed by the provocative tone of the Austrian note and the shortness of the time limit, again warned Lichnowsky of the danger that "European war *à quatre*" - meaning, said Lichnowsky, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany and France would break out if Austria crossed Serbia's frontiers. At the same time he suggested mediation by the four powers not directly affected - Britain, France, Germany and Italy - in the event of "dangerous tension between Russia and Austria." Jagow, however, passed on Grey's request for an extension of the time limit so late that it reached Vienna only after the ultimatum had expired. Moreover, he passed it on without comment, which in diplomatic parlance was tantamount to asking that it should be rejected.

Grey initiated his second attempt at mediation on July 25 with his old proposal that Berlin should intervene in Vienna to say that it found Serbia's answer satisfactory. Again the proposal was passed on without comment, although on the 25th Lichnowsky sent three urgent messages advising Germany to give Austria "the hint." This is not surprising: the Germans were furious with Berchtold for having received the Russian chargé d'affaires on the 24th. "Quite superfluous," commented the Emperor: "will give an impression of weakness. Austria... has... taken the step, now it can't be sort of reconsidered retrospectively."

Meanwhile, Petersburg had announced in an official communiqué that it could not remain "uninterested" if Austria annexed Serbian territory. The French and Russian ambassadors gave it as their personal opinions that Grey's proposal for four-power mediation in London was unacceptable, because the first step must be to mediate between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and thus prevent a local war. Germany accepted this latter proposal, not least in order to prevent the "satisfactory (diplomatic) line to England" from getting cut, especially at a moment when Britain, France and Russia were not yet working as one; Grey had stressed that he distinguished "sharply" between the Austro-Serbian and the Austro-Russian conflicts and did not wish to interfere in the Austro-Serbian affair. The British proposal thus meant "localizing" the conflict, as Germany wished, and it was accordingly answered affirmatively by Jagow late the same evening. On the 26th, however, Bethmann Hollweg, while not revoking the consent, threatened that Germany would mobilize if the reports of alleged call-up of Russian reservists were confirmed. But the deeper reason for Germany's agreement, and for her policy - again announced by the Emperor - of "localizing the conflict" can be found in the documents of the Foreign Ministry and of the Austrian embassy in Berlin. Germany's undoubted object was to thrust Russia far back. Tschirschky had reported on the 24th that Austria wanted "no alteration in the existing power relationships in the Balkans," The Emperor marked this report "weak," and his notes on it reveal what were the objects which Germany was following in the Serbian question: the alteration of the Balkan power relationships, he wrote, "has got to come. Austria must become predominant in the Balkans ... at Russia's expense." Szögyény confirmed that Germany's policy was to "localize the conflict," but that she was aware that localization might prove impossible, and was prepared to risk the consequences. "Here," he reported, "it is generally taken for granted that if Serbia rejects our demands, we shall at once reply by declaring war and opening military operations. We are advised ... to confront the world with a fait accompli (an irreversible act)." On the 25th Giesl left Belgrade; Serbia's answer had thus not been that demanded by Austria. On the same day Franz Joseph signed the order mobilizing eight army corps. The 28th was given as the first day of mobilization. Tisza, too, in an audience with Franz Joseph, gave full support to the German pressure; hesitation would "greatly impair belief in the Monarchy's energy and capacity for action, in the eyes of both friend and foe."

On the 28th Lichnowsky transmitted yet another (the fourth) offer of mediation, this time from King George V as well as Grey. He reported that "since publication of Austrian demands no one here believes any more in the possibility... of localizing conflict"; Britain proposed a conference of ambassadors, "Britain and Germany working together, with France and Italy brought in ... to secure Austria full satisfaction ... since

Serbia would be more easily induced to yield to pressure from the Powers and to submit to their united will, than to Austria's threats." Grey and the Under-Secretaries, Nicolson and Tyrell, saw in this procedure "the only possibility of avoiding general war." "The absolute condition for success of the conference and for maintenance of peace" was, however, "absence of any military dispositions."

If Serbia's territory was violated, Lichnowsky reported, "world war could not be averted." Britain's disapproval of the line being followed by Germany was equally unambiguous. "Localization of the conflict, as hoped for by Berlin, was quite out of the question, and not to be considered as practical politics." Lichnowsky urgently advised the Foreign Ministry "to let our policy be determined singly and solely by the necessity of sparing the German people a struggle in which it has nothing to gain and everything to lose." In spite of these warnings, when Goschen, the British ambassador in Berlin, officially presented the proposal for a conference, Jagow rejected it. Even before this, Bethmann Hollweg had given a formal refusal in writing, on the ground that Germany "could not bring Austria's dealings with Serbia before a European tribunal." The Chancellor was not prepared to listen to Lichnowsky's representations, nor to follow Britain's change of course (meaning the dropping of the distinction between the Austro-Serbian and Austro-Russian conflicts). His replies to London continued to take, as sole basis, the British proposals for localizing the conflict. At the same time, a circular dispatch issued by him reaffirmed Germany's attitude that the conflict concerned only Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

The day before, Berchtold had told Austria's representatives to take the same line, and had added that if localization should prove impossible, Austria-Hungary was reckoning "with gratitude" that Germany "will support us if a struggle against another adversary is forced on us." Again on the 26th, Moltke had drafted a demand to Belgium to allow the passage of German troops in the event of "the imminent war against France and Russia," thereby proving plainly that Germany knew that war between Austria and Russia would immediately produce a continental war. Finally, on the 27th Grey sent an urgent appeal to Berlin to use its influence on Vienna to accept Serbia's answer as satisfactory, for only so could London, on its side, exercise a moderating influence on Petersburg. Lichnowsky reported that if war should after all break out, "it would no longer be possible to count on British sympathy or British support." Grey had said plainly that the key of the situation lay in Berlin; if Berlin was sincere in wanting peace, Austria could be prevented from following "a foolhardy policy." Three hours later Lichnowsky repeated urgently that Grey was convinced that the maintenance of peace depended on Berlin. In London there was a steadily growing impression that "the whole Serbian question was developing into a trial of strength between Triple Alliance and Triple Entente." If Austria-Hungary tried to beat Serbia into submission, Britain, said Lichnowsky, "would most certainly side with France and Russia" (the contents of this telegram were not shown either to Tschirschky or to the Emperor). Reports came in from Russia that Sazonov was being "more conciliatory," trying "to find a bridge ... to satisfy... Austrian demands." Pourtalès reported, however, that the maintenance of the Balkan balance of power was a vital interest of Russia. Rome, too, reported the British proposals for mediation, and von Schoen telegraphed from Paris that France was ready to negotiate. The Quai d'Orsay (French Government) would probably be ready to use its influence in Petersburg if Germany was prepared "to counsel moderation in Vienna, since Serbia had fulfilled nearly every point."

### **The Austro-Hungarian Declaration of War on Serbia**

All these appeals and warnings failed to move Berlin to put any pressure on Vienna to avoid the local conflict. On the contrary, that same day - July 27 - Berchtold, urged thereto by Germany, laid the declaration of war before Franz Joseph for his signature. He explained that, Serbia having answered as she had, the Entente might yet succeed in getting their proposals for mediation adopted "unless a clear situation was created by a declaration of war." Tschirschky reported to Berlin that the declaration of war would go off to Belgrade on July 28, or the 29th at the latest, "chiefly in order to eliminate any possibility of intervention."

This message reveals another feature of German policy in the July crisis. Not only did Germany consistently reject any attempt at mediation not calculated to "localize" the conflict, but while Grey and Sazonov were trying to gain time, Germany was pressing Austria to act quickly. As early as July 14 Vienna had intimated that it wanted to stop short of the irrevocable. In Berchtold's and Franz Joseph's eyes the ultimatum did not necessarily mean war, and Count Mensdorff, the Austrian ambassador in London, seemed not disinclined to

accept Grey's offer of mediation. Germany, however, as she had stated *expressis verbis* (in express terms) on July 25, was pressing for a *fait accompli* (something already done or decided) to prevent other powers from intervening. When it received Tschirschky's report, the Wilhelmstrasse (German Government) saw its goal achieved. The Chancellor accordingly adopted an attitude of reserve towards British pressure and showed no inclination to put quick and explicit pressure on Austria. It was only shortly before midnight that he passed on to Vienna the telegrams received that afternoon from London.

And before they were passed on Jagow had prepared the ground in another conversation with Szögyény. Again, as on July 18, he explained how Vienna was to interpret Germany's apparent change of course; again he confirmed the consistency and purposefulness of Germany's policy. Szögyény reported that, "in order to avoid any misunderstanding," Jagow had twice emphasized that:

*the German government assured Austria in the most binding fashion that it in no way identifies itself with the proposals (sc., the British proposals) which may very shortly be brought to Your Excellency's notice by the German government; if is, on the contrary, decidedly opposed to consideration of them, and is only passing them on out of deference to the British request.*

The Secretary of State himself was "absolutely against taking account of the British wish." At the same time, however, deference to Britain's wish was given as the pretext for the apparent acceptance. When explaining his point of view Jagow was more explicit still:

*The German government's point of view was that it was at the moment of the highest importance to prevent Britain from making common cause with Russia and France. We must therefore avoid any action which might cut the line, which so far had worked so well, between Germany and Britain.*

Bethmann Hollweg confirmed Jagow's point of view when passing on to Tschirschky, late on the evening of the 27th, Lichnowsky's telegram on his interview with Grey:

*As we have already (sic) rejected one British proposal for a conference, it is not possible for us to refuse this suggestion also a limine (at the threshold). If we rejected every attempt at mediation the whole world would hold us responsible for the conflagration and represent us as the real warmongers. That would also make our position impossible here in Germany, where we have got to appear as though the war had been forced on us. Our position is the more difficult because Serbia seems to have given way very extensively. We cannot therefore reject the role of mediator; we have to pass on the British proposal to Vienna for consideration, especially since London and Paris are continuously using their influence on Petersburg.*

Bethmann Hollweg's and Jagow's point of view explains why the British telegram was passed on to Vienna so belatedly, and why the last sentence was – characteristically – suppressed: It might conceivably have given the Austrian government another, eleventh-hour, chance of escaping out of the German stranglehold: "Also, the whole world here is convinced, and I hear the same from my colleagues, that the key to the situation lies in Berlin, and that if Berlin seriously wants peace, it will prevent Vienna from following a foolhardy policy."

But London was sent the completely untruthful message that: "We have immediately initiated mediation in Vienna in the sense desired by Sir Edward Grey."

The duplicity thus shown by the Chancellor in respect of Britain's grave warnings proves that in the night of July 27-28 he was no longer trying to avoid a continental war, but only to manoeuvre Germany into the most favourable position possible. If this aspect of Germany's policy had not emerged clearly enough from the judgment passed on the Anglo-German conversations by Bethmann Hollweg in his commentary when he forwarded Lichnowsky's telegram to Tschirschky, it is made still more plain from the fact that the Chancellor simultaneously forwarded to the Emperor the text of the British offer, with an exposé of Germany's attitude identical with that which had gone to Vienna. Although he wrote that he had "followed the Emperor's orders" in transmitting the British offer, he had in fact distorted the Emperor's intentions in his treatment of Grey's proposal: on returning from his North Sea cruise on the afternoon of July 27 and on

reading Bethmann Hollweg's report that Germany had rejected the conference of ambassadors, Wilhelm had given orders that Grey's next proposal - for direct influence on Vienna - was to be accepted.

It was only on the 28th that the Emperor read Serbia's answer to the ultimatum, although the Serbian chargé d'affaires had handed it to the Foreign Ministry at noon on the 27th. The Emperor's comment confirmed Germany's policy once again: "But that eliminates any reason for war." Wilhelm's "halt in Belgrade" was issued independently of Grey's similar proposal. Since, however, he, unlike the Chancellor, was unaware that Austria's declaration of war on Serbia was imminent, he passed this proposal on to Jagow without much urgency. His opinion was: "The few reservations which Serbia has made with respect to certain points can in my opinion surely be cleared up by negotiation." This was the moment dreaded by the Foreign Ministry and by the military, the danger-hour which might see the monarch's weak nerve give way at the last moment, as it had in 1906 and 1911, before the certainty of war. Accordingly, he was now deliberately deceived. There is no other explanation for the fact that the Chancellor passed on this new suggestion too, belatedly, without urgency, and in distorted form. The only condition laid down by the Emperor in his "halt in Belgrade" was that Austria "had to have a guarantee that the promises were carried out." He thought this could be found in a "temporary occupation of parts of Serbia." In contradiction to this, Bethmann Hollweg emphasized to Tschirschky that the occupation must be the means of compelling "complete fulfilment by the Serbian government of the Austrian demands." But the real falsification of the Emperor's proposals lay in Bethmann Hollweg's express insistence to Tschirschky:

*You must most carefully avoid giving any impression that we want to hold Austria back. We are concerned only to find a modus to enable the realization of Austria-Hungary's aim without at the same time unleashing a world war, and should this after all prove unavoidable, to improve as far as possible the conditions under which it is to be waged.*

### **"The War Guilt is Russia's"**

This addendum of July 28 reveals on the one hand, the motives behind Germany's actions and on the other the Chancellor's conscious risk of a world war. For he himself explained what he meant by "favourable conditions": Firstly, Russia must be made to appear to blame for the outbreak of war, and secondly, Britain must be kept neutral. Bethmann Hollweg believed himself to have found the key to this problem in the "policy of localization." As early as July 26 he had expounded Germany's governing ideas very clearly both to the Emperor and to Pourtalès, Lichnowsky and Schoen, in the words: "Since Count Berchtold has assured Russia that Austria is not aiming at any territorial extensions in Serbia ... the maintenance of European peace depends exclusively on Russia." Germany's attitude must be "calm," for only if attacked could Germany count on British neutrality and carry public opinion at home with her, the chief need being to get the Social Democrats' support for war. From this point on the idea of making "Russia alone responsible for any extension of the conflict and disturbance of the European peace" appears with increasing frequency in the German documents. Jagow tried to influence the attitude of Italy, Rumania and Bulgaria in the event of a conflagration by asserting that both Germany and Britain were continually at pains to "keep the conflict localized" and that only Russia could begin the war.

The Chancellor took up this line of argument again in a memorandum sent by him on July 28, qua (in the capacity of) Prussian Prime Minister, to the Prussian legations at the German Courts. Again he defended Austria's conduct and underlined his policy of localizing the conflict. Just as Jagow, for example, writing to Bucharest on July 26, had alluded to the "obvious consequences" should Russia move against Austria, so Bethmann Hollweg ended his memorandum with the following passage:

*Meanwhile should, contrary to our hopes, an intervention by Russia spread the conflagration, then we should be bound under our alliance to support our neighbour with the whole might of the Reich. Only under compulsion would we resort to the sword, but if we did so, it would be in calm assurance that we were guiltless of the sufferings which war might bring to the peoples of Europe .... Russia alone must bear the responsibility if a European war breaks out.*

Finally, the Chancellor drafted a telegram from the Emperor to the Tsar which reveals more clearly still his intention of saddling Russia with the odium of a "European conflagration." "If," he told the Emperor, "war should come after all, such a telegram would make Russia's guilt glaringly plain."

At 11 a.m. on July 28 Austria presented her declaration of war on Serbia. It was not until the afternoon that Tschirschky appeared with the Emperor's "halt in Belgrade." Berchtold rejected any intervention as too late. At the same time, however, tension had arisen between Vienna and Berlin. On July 27 Jagow had realized that Austria could not begin hostilities "in practice" until August 12. The German government found this delay regrettable, and in his telegram to Tschirschky of July 28, quoted above, Bethmann Hollweg explained the motives of German policy, which was not so much concerned to prevent a European war, as to avoid Austria getting herself saddled, out of weakness and (as Lerchenfeld reported to Munich) political stupidity, with the odium of having herself provoked the war.

*The Imperial government is thus put into the extraordinarily difficult position of being exposed during the intervening period to the other Powers' proposals for mediation and conferences, and if it continues to maintain its previous reserve towards such proposals, the odium of having provoked a world war will in the end recoil on it, even in the eyes of the German people. But a successful war on three fronts (viz., in Serbia, Russia and France) cannot be initiated and carried on on such a basis. It is imperative that the responsibility for any extension of the conflict to Powers not directly concerned should under all circumstances fall on Russia alone.*

The Chancellor held unwaveringly to his line: "localization" of the conflict; should this prove impossible, then Russia must be branded as the aggressor, thus to assure Britain's neutrality. The first object was achieved: from the outbreak of the war to the present day, the chief responsibility for it has been ascribed to Russia. The hope of British neutrality was to prove a great illusion.

In spite of all Lichnowsky's warnings, the German government continued to count confidently on British neutrality in a European conflict. It also hoped that neither Italy nor Rumania would be able to intervene actively against Germany. With Austria-Hungary's declaration of war, however, the diplomatic manoeuvrings reached the critical stage when the event would show whether the confident attitude of Germany's diplomacy and the threat of her "gleaming sword" would again tip the balance and secure localization of the conflict, as in 1908-1909. The question whether localization was possible was raised on the afternoon of July 28, when Conrad asked whether mobilization was to be carried through against Serbia alone, or also against Russia; for he needed to know which the fronts were to be by the fifth day of mobilization, or all the troop trains would be sent towards Serbia. The "automatic operation of the war machine" now began to show its effects in Germany, as well as Austria-Hungary. Simultaneously with a call from Szögyény, bringing Conrad's request for pressure on Russia (Berchtold already thought it essential for both Austria and Germany to answer Russia's partial mobilization by general mobilization), the Chancellor received a memorandum from the general staff in which Moltke gave a clear and unambiguous analysis of the mechanics of mobilization and alliances and explained that they must inevitably lead to world war. Moltke emphasized particularly the causal nexus linking Austria's intervention against Serbia via Russian partial mobilization to Austrian, Russian and German general mobilizations, which would then inevitably draw in France, the first objective of German military strategy. The general staff's appreciation of the military position caused the Foreign Ministry to revise its view of the importance of Russia's partial mobilization (which the day before Jagow had not regarded as a cause for German mobilization). Up to this point Bethmann Hollweg had rejected as premature Austria's request for far-reaching military counter-measures, but under this pressure from Moltke and Conrad he addressed Petersburg in almost ultimatum terms, although the day before, Pourtalès had reported Sazonov as entirely ready to come an astonishingly long way to meet Austria's standpoint, which would have made possible some relaxation of the diplomatic tension. It was technically necessary for the military to get a clear picture of Russia's attitude, but Bethmann Hollweg's sharp tone was also clearly in line with the whole of German diplomacy during the July crisis. So long as England remained out - and it was hoped that a declaration of war by Russia would ensure this - the Chancellor was not in the least afraid of putting the Triple Alliance to the test of a European war.

As pendant to his strong attitude towards Russia, Bethmann Hollweg made every effort to appear in British eyes as the ardent searcher after peace. In two further interviews with Falkenhayn and Moltke, in the morning and the late evening of July 29, on each occasion before meeting the British ambassador, he succeeded in getting the proclamation of a state of emergency, for which the Prussian Minister of War was pressing, postponed, arguing that Germany must wait until Russia began general mobilization; for unless the blame for "the whole shlemozzle" could be pushed on to Russia, it was vain to hope for Britain's neutrality. If, however, Russia were saddled with the war guilt, Britain could not take her side. The generals, nevertheless, although still bound by the imperial "halt!" yet decided to send to the German minister in Brussels the demand (drafted on July 26) to allow the passage of German armies through Belgium.

In his morning conversation with Goschen on this day of July 29 Bethmann Hollweg again emphasized Germany's will for peace, and informed the ambassador in the strictest confidence of the Emperor's note to Vienna (Halt in Belgrade), again trying to give the impression that he was putting the brake on hard in Vienna, which, as we have seen, was in reality far from being the case. In the afternoon the Emperor consulted successively the Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, the Minister of War, von Falkenhayn, the Chief of the General Staff, von Moltke, the Head of the Military Cabinet, von Lyncker (4:40 p.m.), Grand Admiral Prince Henry (6:10 p.m.), the Secretary of State for the Navy, von Tirpitz, the Chief of the Naval Staff, von Pohl, and the Head of the Naval Cabinet, von Müller (7:15 p.m.). The conversations seemed to confirm Germany's hopes of British neutrality, for Prince Henry was able to report that George V ("Georgy") would remain neutral. The word of a king which the Emperor accepted, although von Tirpitz had doubts, brought the conversation round to France, Belgium and Holland. The Emperor emphasized that Germany wanted no territorial annexations from France, although his reasons reflected unspoken first war aims: Germany only wanted guarantees which should enable her to "prevent" further wars. Wilhelm built so largely on King George's reported word that (with Tirpitz's strong support) he rejected the proposal made by Bethmann Hollweg (who hoped to make the offer a sort of reward to Britain for her neutrality) for a naval agreement with Britain.

In his evening conversation with von Falkenhayn and von Moltke the Chancellor again insisted that Germany must wait until Russia ordered general mobilization or attacked Austria. For partial mobilization did not create a *casus foederis*, it did not necessarily involve war. Germany must wait for total mobilization, because only thereafter would both German and British public opinion support Germany's attitude in "the imminent war with Russia and France" (as the ultimatum to Belgium had already put it).

Germany concentrated her hopes ever more on getting Britain's promise of neutrality made contractual - as she had already tried to do on the occasion of the Haldane Mission. In the famous conversation between Bethmann Hollweg and Goschen late in the night of July 29-30 the Chancellor tried to pin Britain down by holding out prospects of a general agreement on neutrality. He assured Goschen: "We can assure the British Cabinet - *provided we are certain of their neutrality* - that even in case of a victorious war we shall not seek any territorial advantage in Europe at the expense of France" - a promise which, however, when Goschen raised the point, he refused to extend to France's colonies. Further, he declared himself ready to respect the neutrality and integrity of Holland, provided Germany's enemies would do the same. In speaking of Belgium, however, he betrayed Germany's intention of violating her neutrality by giving only the obscure assurance (which also agreed verbatim with the ultimatum) that Belgium's integrity (he did not mention her sovereignty) should not be impaired after the war "provided Belgium does not take sides against us" - provided, that is, Belgium did not resist Germany's illegal violation of her territory.

The British immediately grasped the decisive importance of this conversation. Now, Grey for the first time recognized Germany's intention of drawing the maximum political advantage from the Serbian conflict, even at the risk of European war. That on top of this Germany proposed to march through Belgium, Bethmann Hollweg had already admitted. Grey called the German offer "infamous." Similarly, Eyre Crowe, his right-hand man in the Foreign Ministry, concluded that Germany had practically made up her mind "to go to war." What had held her back hitherto had only been the fear that Britain would come to the help of France and Belgium. At the same time, however, the interview had revealed Germany's intentions; wrapped up as they had been, they could be recognized simply as the first stages of those German war aims which revealed themselves nakedly soon after the outbreak of the war: French colonies, in continuation of the

policy of the second Morocco crisis of 1911; in respect of France herself Germany was binding herself only if Britain should remain neutral in a continental war (when she would make this sacrifice). In that case she would renounce annexations at the expense of France; but the implied converse of this observance was that if Britain entered the war, Germany, if victorious, would claim a free hand to annex French territory. The same reservation had been made also in respect of Belgium. Since Belgium resisted, Germany afterwards claimed a free hand there also; this reservation was already implicit in Bethmann Hollweg's words.

The position had been clarified. Germany had revealed her aims to Britain in the hope that the attempts made by both sides to reach a political settlement would now bear fruit. The conversation also marked the high watermark of Germany's "policy of localization"; the dispatch in which Goschen reported the conversation, the verbal accuracy of which he got the Chancellor to check immediately afterwards, showed no sign of compromise either in tone or in substance. It was only after the British ambassador, who, as he said himself, had hardly been able to repress his astonishment but had raised no objections, had left the room, that Bethmann Hollweg received Lichnowsky's telegram, which had arrived earlier but had only now been deciphered. Its contents for the first time shook the whole structure of Bethmann Hollweg's diplomacy, the corner-stone of which had been the hope of British neutrality.

### **The Collapse of Bethmann Hollweg's Policy**

Lichnowsky reported that Grey had again repeated with extreme earnestness his proposal for four-power mediation, and had emphasized that Britain, as a neutral power, was prepared, if Germany helped her, to mediate between Austria-Hungary on the one side and Serbia and Russia on the other, but that the moment France was drawn into the war, Britain would not be able to stand aside. This upset the calculation on the basis of which Germany had urged Austria to take military action against Serbia and believed herself capable of regarding the prospect of European war "with equanimity" in the confident hope that Britain would after all remain neutral if the responsibility for the war were laid on Russia. Now the situation suddenly became threatening. Only three days before Jagow had confidently told Jules Cambon who thought that Britain would intervene immediately: "You have your information, we have ours; we are certain of British neutrality." The Germans, Bethmann Hollweg most of all, were surprised, even shattered, by Lichnowsky's report, and they grew unsure of themselves. The foundation of their policy during the crisis had collapsed. Britain would not remain neutral if France were "drawn into" the war. The telegram sent to Tschirschky at 3 a.m. on the 30th to inform him of Lichnowsky's message described the new situation:

*If, therefore, Austria should reject all mediation, we are faced with a conflagration in which Britain would be against us, Italy and Rumania in all probability not with us. We should be two Great Powers against four. With Britain an enemy, the weight of the operations would fall on Germany... Under these circumstances we must urgently and emphatically suggest to the Vienna cabinet acceptance of mediation under the present honourable conditions. The responsibility falling on us and Austria for the consequences which would ensue in case of refusal would be uncommonly heavy.*

Only five minutes later Bethmann Hollweg sent a telegram to Vienna in which he summoned his ally even more energetically to stop "refusing any exchange of views with Russia." "We are prepared," he went on, "to fulfil our duty as allies, but must refuse to allow Vienna to draw us into a world conflagration frivolously and without regard to our advice."

These two documents, composed simultaneously and dispatched to Vienna in the small hours, are used, together with Bethmann Hollweg's address to the Prussian Ministry of State on the afternoon of the same July 30, to prove the peaceable nature of Germany's policy and to show the "absolutely desperate efforts" made by Bethmann Hollweg to make Vienna retreat. But the significant thing about them is not so much Bethmann Hollweg's urgent attempt to get Vienna to accept the British proposals as the fact that they find no parallel among the documents of the night of July 29-30 or of July 30 itself. The first dispatches to go out after the arrival of the news from London, they are the products of the shock born of the unexpected information about Britain's attitude.

As late as 11:05 p.m. on the 29th Bethmann Hollweg, completely consistently with his previous policy of "localization," had summoned Russia in almost ultimatum terms "not to provoke any warlike conflict with Austria." At 12:30 a.m. he informed Vienna of Russia's partial mobilization and added: "To avert a general catastrophe, or" - and this shows clearly the tactics consistently followed by German civilian policy, uninfluenced by the Emperor or the general staff - "in any case to put Russia in the wrong, we must urgently wish Vienna to begin and continue conversations [with Russia] in accordance with telegram 174." The deductions drawn by the Chancellor from the "Russian mobilization" are astonishing, for telegram 174 was that sent by Jagow to Tschirschky on the 28th, which gave Vienna its first information of the British proposals for mediation, but with the characteristic addition: "You must avoid most carefully giving any impression that we want to hold Austria back." Up to the morning of July 30 Berlin had followed its policy of absolutely pressing action on Austria. It was only after 12:30 a.m. that Bethmann Hollweg saw Lichnowsky's report from London; this he sent on to Vienna at 2:55 a.m. with the first urgent warning. This telegram, however, also explains what the German "advice" for the prevention of the "world conflagration" really came to. Austria-Hungary was thus not being at all "tough" (*pace* [by leave of] Gerhard Ritter) or obstinate, or set on war, and Germany was not being dragged in her wake. Furthermore, Austria-Hungary had involved herself so deeply in the crisis that neither Berchtold nor Tisza thought it possible for her, as a great power, to give way now to German pressure which, moreover, was not applied with the whole weight available to Germany. Moreover, Vienna had, as the discussions went on, grown ever more convinced that the way to strengthen the structure of the Monarchy was by way of a war covered by Germany.

But this is not the only circumstance revealing the exceptional character of the documents; there are also the warnings given in the course of July 30. For the very next documents show plainly that what chiefly concerned Bethmann Hollweg was not so much to save the peace as such as to shift the responsibility and guilt for the war onto Russia. But the essential point was that although the premises of Bethmann Hollweg's policy, his conditions for undertaking war, as laid down by him on July 5 and 6, had collapsed, he could not steel himself to change his policy, to talk unambiguously to Vienna and to force it to obey him. A declaration to this effect, combined with a threat to leave Austria alone if she disregarded it, could have saved the Reich from the catastrophe of a war waged under conditions which had become so unfavourable. But nothing was done. On the contrary, the old policy was resumed in the course of the 30th.

This emerges clearly from the record of the meeting of the Prussian Ministry of State on July 30, to which Bethmann Hollweg reported on the situation. His main preoccupation was again "to represent Russia as the guilty party," and this, he thought, would be most easily achieved if Vienna accepted Germany's suggestion, namely, to assure Petersburg that she meant only to occupy parts of Serbia temporarily, as guarantee for the satisfaction of her demands. But it also emerges clearly why Bethmann Hollweg was still continuing to insist on Russia's "war guilt." Previously his chief motive had been to secure Britain's neutrality - a hope which, he now remarked bitterly, had practically disappeared; the second factor in his "mission" as Chancellor (second to the rapprochement with Britain) now came increasingly into the foreground. If the declaration of war came from Russia, he said, there was "nothing to fear" from the Social Democrats. "There will be no question of a general or partial strike, or of sabotage." The British intervention had shifted the emphasis in his motives, no more. This appears plainly in the dispatch sent that evening to Vienna and in its cancellation, which also affected indirectly the German move taken in the course of the night.

*If (the Chancellor wired to Tschirschky on the evening of July 30) Vienna refuses... to give way at all, it will hardly be possible to place the blame on Russia for the outbreak of the European conflagration [not to prevent the war, but to place the blame on Russia]. H.M. has, on the request of the Tsar, undertaken to intervene in Vienna, because he could not refuse without awakening an irrefutable suspicion that we wanted war.*

Alluding to Britain's attempts to mediate in Paris and Petersburg, he went on:

*If these efforts of Britain's meet with success, while Vienna refuses everything, Vienna will prove that it is set on having a war, into which we are dragged, while Russia remains free of guilt. This puts us in a quite impossible position in the eyes of our own people. We can therefore only urgently recommend Vienna to accept Grey's proposal, which safeguards its position in every way.*



The telegram stresses once again the cardinal importance of British neutrality, of Russian war guilt and of national solidarity as the factors governing German policy. Yet Germany's peaceful protestations to Britain were purely tactical, as is made plain by the fate of a telegram from King George to Prince Henry suggesting cooperation between Germany and Britain to save the peace. This telegram arrived just before midnight (11:08 p.m.) on July 30. Vague as was the glimmer of hope which it offered that Britain might remain neutral, it was enough for Bethmann Hollweg to cancel his demand that Vienna should "accept Grey's proposal" only twelve minutes later (11:20 p.m.). At the same time the Chancellor completely lifted such pressure - and it had been weak enough - as he had been putting on Vienna. No proof could be plainer of the tactical nature of Germany's "peace moves." Comparison with the instructions sent to Tschirschky makes this more glaring still. Telegram No. 200 called on Vienna to accept mediation, since otherwise Russia "would bear no blame." Telegram No. 201, sent by Jagow in the same hour, rejected Austria's proposal for a joint *démarche* (approach) in Paris and Petersburg on the ground that Germany "could not take the same step again." Telegram No. 202 cancelled telegram No. 200. Telegram No. 203 explained telegram No. 202, and telegram No. 204 on July 31 demanded Austria's "immediate participation in the war against Russia."

Besides explaining the cancellation telegram by King George's message, Bethmann Hollweg had also drafted, although not yet sent, a military explanation which ran: "I have cancelled execution of instructions in No. 200, because the General Staff has just informed me that military measures by our neighbours, especially in the east, compel speedy decision if we are not to be taken by surprise." This alluded to the military considerations which became more and more prominent on July 30 and acquired great cogency when the news of Russia's partial mobilization arrived.

## **The Beginning of World War**

That the two demands sent to Vienna - for tactical reasons, and by no means in any "desperate endeavour to save the peace" - to accept the British proposals constitute an isolated episode, a hesitation in view of Britain's attitude, appears more plainly than ever if we turn to the steps initiated by Moltke when the news of Russia's partial mobilization against Austria-Hungary arrived. As late as July 29, Moltke and Falkenhayn postponed the proclamation of a "state of imminent war," in obedience to the Emperor's orders and out of deference to Bethmann Hollweg's hopes of British neutrality, but on the morning of July 30 all such considerations were swept aside when the Foreign Ministry (presumably Zimmermann) passed on to the general staff the Emperor's marginal notes on Pourtalés' report that Russia had ordered partial mobilization. Wilhelm's comment on Sazonov's announcement that Russia was "mobilizing against Austria" was: "Then I must mobilize too," and he went on: "Then he (referring to Tsar Nicholas II) is taking on himself the guilt" (for a European war) I regard my attempted mediation as having failed." In such theatrical wise did Wilhelm II lay down what on another occasion he called his "office of mediator," an office which he had in reality never assumed. The Chancellor thereupon informed the Emperor "that any explanation given by Vienna to Petersburg on the purpose and extent of Austria's measures against Serbia (which he urged Berchtold to give) could only make Russia's guilt heavier and prove it more clearly to the whole world." Thus did Bethmann Hollweg again interpret to the Emperor on July 30 the governing principles of his policy.

But the noonday hours of July 30 are important in other respects also. During these hours the Emperor received further information both on the Russian partial mobilization and on Britain's attitude, the latter supported by a report from the naval attaché in London that "the British fleet will launch an instant and immediate attack on us at sea if it comes to war between us and France." This report caused the Emperor extraordinary consternation and disillusionment. He and Prince Henry had just been concocting an answer to King George, based on his first message that "we shall try all we can to keep out of this and to remain neutral." He had hoped very long that Britain would remain neutral, but when the dispatches reached him - very, very belatedly - the situation changed. Their effect on Bethmann Hollweg was to cause temporary hesitations and retreats; on the Emperor it was the opposite. His naked hatred of "perfidious Albion," of "that filthy cur, Grey," of "that filthy nation of grocers" vented itself with elemental violence. "England drops the mask the moment she thinks we are safely in the corral and done for, so to speak." He now discovered who was the real war criminal, for Russia would never have been able to begin the war without England's support. "England alone is responsible for war and peace, not we any more!" The Emperor's

marginal notes grow more and more sweeping. Germany is encircled; the war of annihilation has been concerted; Germany is to go under; all this is purposeful "anti-German world policy"; "and there have been people," he writes in sarcastic allusion to the Chancellor, "who have believed it possible to win over or appease England by one petty concession or another!!! And we have put our heads into the noose and have even introduced the slow march in our naval program in the pathetic hope that this would placate England!!!" Wilhelm II felt himself betrayed and double-crossed. "Edward VII dead is stronger than I am alive." At the same time, however - and this is the further and historic importance of Grey's warning and of Pourtalès' reports - his long-harboured idea turned into the conscious purpose of destroying the British Empire by unleashing revolution in the Mohammedan world...

First, however, the Emperor's attitude had enabled the military to begin action in Prussia and Germany. Since Russia's partial mobilization did not yet constitute, in German eyes, sufficient ground for Germany to initiate general mobilization, Moltke pressed Austria-Hungary to adopt instant general mobilization without, however, declaring war on Russia, since the *casus foederis* for Germany would only arise if Russia declared war - and if Russia declared war, Moltke still believed that Britain would keep out. When, then, at 11:50 a telegram from Pourtalès revealed the extent of Russian partial mobilization, the military were alerted. Nevertheless, when Bethmann Hollweg met Falkenhayn and Tirpitz at noon on the 30th, he succeeded once again in securing postponement of the proclamation of "imminent threat of war" on grounds of internal policy. Moltke, however, who had attended the meeting uninvited, now took independent action. He sent an urgent warning to Conrad to mobilize immediately against Russia (letting the dispositions against Serbia take second place) and to announce as his reason the Russian proclamation of partial mobilization ("thus," according to Ritter, "making Russia appear the aggressor"). Only "so would the *casus foederis* (reason for activating an alliance) for Germany arise." Britain's latest step to preserve the peace must be rejected. "To last out a European war" was "the last means of preserving Austria-Hungary." "Germany will come in under all circumstances." In the evening Moltke repeated his demands and sent the assurance that "Germany would mobilize." Szögyény reported that "till recently, all authoritative circles here had regarded the possibility of a European conflict with the most complete calm." Since July 30 signs of nervousness had become apparent, but the reason was not nervousness over the outbreak of a European war, but "anxiety lest Italy might fail to fulfil her obligations towards her partners in the Triple Alliance in the event of a general conflict." It was only because Berlin and Vienna "absolutely needed Italy if they were to be safe in entering a general conflict" that Germany was repeatedly pressing Vienna - as Moltke did twice on the 30th - to go to the limit in meeting Italy over the question of compensation.

At 9 p.m. on the 30th Bethmann Hollweg and Jagow yielded to Moltke's and Falkenhayn's insistence that the "state of imminent war" must be proclaimed by noon on the next day at the latest. At midnight, only three hours after the evening meeting, Moltke had his adjutant, von Haeften, draft the Emperor's proclamation to his people, his army and his navy. At 9 a.m. on July 31 it was agreed that the order for the measures of mobilization consequent on this proclamation should be issued if Russia's general mobilization was confirmed.

The report of Russia's general mobilization was confirmed at noon on July 31. In the afternoon the Emperor, speaking from a balcony of the Palace, proclaimed a "state of imminent threat of war," declaring that "they are pressing the sword into our hand," Bethmann Hollweg's courage in waiting for Russia to order general mobilization had thus reaped its reward: the German people was ready for war in the conviction that it had been gratuitously assailed. Sazonov had put this trump into his hand. By making Russia appear the guilty party, Bethmann Hollweg had also been able to eliminate the possibility of opposition from the Social Democrats. On the 31st Lerchenfeld reported to Munich, sarcastically but with relief, that the Social Democrats had "in duty bound, demonstrated in favour of peace," but were now "keeping quite quiet." This was also the purpose of giving Russia twelve hours' notice in the ultimatum, and of the postponement until August 1 (made possible by the perfection of her dispositions) of Germany's general mobilization.

At the very last hour it again appeared possible that Bethmann Hollweg's policy might bear fruit and Britain remain neutral. On August 1, after the order for mobilization had been signed, an offer arrived from London to guarantee France's neutrality. This seemed to hold out the prospect of war on a single front. The Emperor accepted the offer and ordered Moltke "to hold up the advance westward." There followed the famous scene

which exposed the utter helplessness of Germany's military rigidity. Moltke protested against the Emperor's order, saying that the only up-to-date plan of campaign (the famous Schlieffen Plan, revised by him in 1913) provided for attack only against France. Nevertheless the Emperor ordered that the advance, which had already begun - patrols had penetrated into Luxemburg - was to be halted. Moltke was beside himself at the possibility of France remaining neutral and said that if the advance into France did not take place, he could "undertake no responsibility for the war." "Now," he remarked bitterly, as we know from the recollections of the Head of the Naval Cabinet, "it only remains for Russia to back out, too." After sharp argument, the Chancellor and the Chief of the General Staff ended by agreeing that the advance would have to go on "for technical reasons." Britain's offer had come too late. Yet the illusion persisted and even gathered strength. A second telegram from Lichnowsky on the same day suggested a possibility that Britain might remain neutral even in a war between Germany and both Russia and France. "What a fabulous turn of events," reported Müller "the Emperor was delighted, and called for champagne," as was his habit later, during the war, to celebrate real or imagined victories. Bethmann Hollweg's policy seemed to have succeeded. Germany could engage Russia and France at her ease. But these hopes were to prove short-lived.

The subsequent disillusionment served to inflame still further Germany's hatred of Britain, which now became almost unbounded. On the other hand, it cleared the way for the westward advance as foreseen in the Schlieffen Plan. Italy having declared neutrality, the Germans began the World War in the face of the most unfavourable possible grouping of the powers. The declaration of war on Russia on August 1 and on France on August 3, punctilious as they were from the bureaucratic point of view and devastating as were their effects on opinion elsewhere in the world, nevertheless only marked the formal end of the complex process which had led up to them. In this respect, too, it is characteristic that Austria-Hungary's declarations of war on Russia and on the Western Powers followed only a week later, under German pressure, and that Germany's declaration of war had long since started on its journey when the Tsar telegraphed again to express confidence that peace could still be preserved in spite of the mobilizations. The violation of Belgium's neutrality enabled the British government to win over parliament and people for immediate entry into the war, a decision politically motivated by the often-expressed determination not to allow Germany to overthrow France and leave Britain to face alone a continent dominated by Germany.

### **Who Was "Guilty"?**

There is no question but that the conflict of military and political interests, of resentment and ideas, which found expression in the July crisis, left no government of any of the European powers quite free of some measure of responsibility - greater or smaller - for the outbreak of the war in one respect or another, it is, however, not the purpose of this work to enter into the familiar controversy, on which whole libraries have been written, over the question of war guilt, to discuss exhaustively the responsibility of the individual statesmen and soldiers of all the European powers concerned, or to pass final judgment on them. We are concerned solely with the German leaders' objectives and with the policy actually followed by them in the July crisis, and that only insofar as their policy throws light on the postulates and origins of Germany's war aims.

It must be repeated: given the tenseness of the world situation in 1914 - a condition for which Germany's world policy, which had already led to three dangerous crises (those of 1905, 1908 and 1911), was in no small measure responsible - any limited or local war in Europe directly involving one great power must inevitably carry with it the imminent danger of a general war. As Germany willed and coveted the Austro-Serbian war and, in her confidence in her military superiority, deliberately faced the risk of a conflict with Russia and France, her leaders must bear a substantial share of the historical responsibility for the outbreak of general war in 1914. This responsibility is not diminished by the fact that at the last moment Germany tried to arrest the march of destiny, for her efforts to influence Vienna were due exclusively to the threat of British intervention and, even so, they were half-hearted, belated and immediately revoked.

It is true that German politicians and publicists, and with them the entire German propaganda machine during the war and German historiography after the war - particularly after Versailles - have invariably maintained that the war was forced on Germany, or at least (adopting Lloyd George's dictum, made for political reasons, that "we all stumbled into the war") that Germany's share of the responsibility was no

greater than that of the other participants. But confidential exchanges between Germany and Austria, and between the responsible figures in Germany itself, untinged by any propagandist intent, throw a revealing spotlight on the real responsibility.

A few weeks after the outbreak of war, during the crises on the Marne and in Galicia, the Austrians asked urgently for German help against the superior Russian armies facing them. It was refused. Count Tisza then advised Berchtold to tell the Germans: "That we took our decision to go to war on the strength of the express statements both of the German Emperor and of the German Imperial Chancellor that they regarded the moment as suitable and would be glad if we showed ourselves in earnest."

Just three years later, on August 14, 1917, at the climax of a heated debate whether the war should be continued in the interest of Germany's war aims, Austria-Hungary's Foreign Minister, Count Czernin, told his German interlocutors excitedly: "It was not Austria alone that began the war then." Characteristically, the official German minutes in the Imperial Chancellery left Czernin's next sentence incomplete and passed over the retorts of the German statesmen, Michaelis, Kühlmann and Helfferich, but the minutes of the Army High Command (the OHL) gave the sentence in full: "Germany demanded that the ultimatum to Serbia should be drawn up in those sharp terms."

In February 1918, again, Czernin asked Berchtold if he would object if he (Czernin) published a letter written by him to Tisza shortly before the outbreak of war, which showed "what strong efforts Germany was making at that time to hold us to a hard line, and how our alliance might have been in danger if we had given way."

There is other evidence to confirm that the Central Powers in no way "slid into war." Josef Baernreither, an Austrian politician who was entirely well disposed towards the Reich and was a leading champion of the Mitteleuropa idea during the war, made the following entry on the July crisis in his diary for December 1914:

*The Germans were afraid that we would refuse to go with them if the war broke out over some question remote from us. At Algeciras we were still "seconds": later, not even that; in the Morocco crisis we did not stand by Germany firmly. But war was bound to come, as things had developed, through the faults of German and Austro-Hungarian diplomacy. So when the Sarajevo murder took place, Germany seized her opportunity and made an Austrian grievance her signal for action. That is the history of the war.*

Finally, on October 8, 1919, Czernin telegraphed to Karl H. von Wiegand (the Berlin correspondent of the *Herald* and *Examiner*) the following reply to questions addressed to him by Wiegand:

*Repeated conversations and interviews I had with Ambassador von Tschirschky could create no other impression than that his (the German) government expected warlike action on our part against Serbia. Especially a conversation I had with him during the early half of July convinced me that if we did not show this time that we were in earnest, then on the next occasion Berlin not only would not support us, but would in fact "orient" itself in some other direction.*

*What that would have meant for us, in view of the ethnographical composition of the Dual Monarchy and the territorial aspirations of our neighbour states, need not be explained.*

*Tschirschky was informed about the material points in the ultimatum to Serbia before the final editing of the note and the textual contents were given to him two days before the Belgrade démarche.*

Baernreither was confirmed in his view of the nature of the July crisis by a conversation which he had in November 1915 with Otto Hoetzsch of Berlin, the historian of eastern Europe, leader-writer for the *Kreuzzeitung* and later German National deputy in the Reichstag. "Then" (Sc., after July 5, 1914), runs the entry in Baernreither's diary, "the Emperor went off to Norway, knowing certainly that war would break out. Germany had arranged all this very cleverly, and had shown alertness and judgment in picking an occasion

when she was certain of Austria's support in waging a war the inevitability of which had been becoming apparent for years past."

A week later Hoetzsch's Berlin colleague, the economist Jastrow, confirmed the correctness of Hoetzsch's view to Baernreither.

Arthur von Gwinner, Director of the Deutsche Bank, again confirmed most clearly the will to risk war which existed in Germany, especially in the Foreign Ministry, in a conversation which he had on the July crisis at the end of August 1914 with von Capelle, the Under-Secretary of State in the Reich Naval Office. He, too, stressed the factor of Austria's unreliability:

*The only reason why Lichnowsky was not informed was because here (in the Wilhelmstrasse) they were determined to force a conflict. When Capelle asked who had been the man behind this pressure, Gwinner answered, "Herr von Stumm, in the Foreign Office, for example." When Capelle expressed some doubt, he went on: "Perhaps it was a whole group. They worked systematically to get Austria committed inextricably, as the first step, so as to be sure of her. The whole plan of campaign against Serbia was arranged in advance to make a conflict inevitable."*

This grave statement was published as early as 1926 by no less a man than Grand Admiral von Tirpitz, in his *Deutsche Ohnmachtspolitik* (Germany's Policy of Weakness), but it has, so far as the author knows, passed unnoticed.

Admiral Müller, commenting in his diary on the Entente's answer of December 31, 1916, to the German peace offer - a document which ascribed to Germany a substantial share of the guilt for the World War - wrote that it "contained certain bitter truths on our doings at the outbreak of the war."

Finally Albert Ballin, Bethmann Hollweg's and Jagow's intimate political confidant (he was sent to London by Jagow at the beginning of the crisis of July 1914, in an attempt to secure Britain's neutrality, and was summoned to Berlin in the middle of 1915 to help draft Germany's note to the United States which was to decide on peace or war with America but was not received by Jagow after all), wrote at that date to the Secretary of State, out of his intimate knowledge of what had been done in July 1914:

*I make every allowance for a man who is heavily incriminated, as Your Excellency is, and has to bear the frightful responsibility for having staged this war (für die Inszenierung dieses Krieges) which is costing Germany generations of splendid men and setting her back 100 years.*

The official documents afforded ample proofs that during the July crisis the Emperor, the German military leaders and the Foreign Ministry were pressing Austria-Hungary to strike against Serbia without delay, or alternatively agreed to the dispatch of an ultimatum to Serbia couched in such sharp terms as to make war between the two countries more than probable, and that in doing so they deliberately took the risk of a continental war against Russia and France. But the decisive point is that, as we now know - although for a long time it was not admitted - these groups were not alone. On July 5 and 6 the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, the man in whom the constitution vested the sole responsibility, decided to take the risk and even over-trumped the Emperor when he threatened to weaken. That this was no "tragic doom," no "ineluctable destiny," but a deliberate decision of policy emerges beyond doubt from the diary of his private secretary, Kurt Riezler, who recorded in it his conversations with the Chancellor in the critical days (and, indeed, over many years). These diaries have not yet been published, but the extracts from them which have seen the light furnish irrefutable proof that during the July crisis Bethmann Hollweg was ready for war. More than this. Riezler's entry for the evening of July 8, after Bethmann Hollweg's return to Hohenfinow (where Rathenau was also stopping) shows what advance calculations the leaders of Germany were making in respect of the situation produced by the Sarajevo murder. According to his secretary, the Chancellor said: "If war doesn't come, if the Tsar doesn't want it or France panics and advises peace, we have still achieved this much, that we have manoeuvred the Entente into disintegration over this move."

In other words, Bethmann Hollweg reckoned with a major general war as the result of Austria's swift punitive action against Serbia. If, however, Russia and France were again to draw back (as in 1909 and 1911) - which he at first regarded as the less probable eventuality - then at least Germany would have achieved a signal diplomatic victory: she would have split Russia from France and isolated both without war. But war was what he expected, and how he expected its course to run we learn from his predecessor in the Chancellorship, Bülow, who had a long discussion with him at the beginning of August. Bethmann Hollweg told Bülow that he was reckoning with "a war lasting three, or at the most, four months..., a violent, but short storm." Then, he went on, revealing his innermost wishes, it would "In spite of the war, indeed, through it," be possible to establish a friendly relationship with England, and through England with France. He hoped to bring about "a grouping of Germany, England and France against the Russian colossus which threatens the civilization of Europe."

Bethmann Hollweg himself often hinted darkly during the war how closely Germany had been involved in the beginning of the war. He was less concerned with the "staging" of it than to register the spirit of the German leaders who had made it possible for the war to be begun even after the premises for it had collapsed. The following bitter words are taken from his address to the Central Committee of the Reichstag at the beginning of October 1916, during the sharp debate on the initiation of unlimited submarine warfare; they outline Germany's real "guilt," her constant overestimation of her own powers, and her misjudgement of realities:

*Since the outbreak of the war we have not always avoided the danger of underestimating the strength of our enemies. The extraordinary development of the last twenty years seduced wide circles into overestimating our own forces, mighty as they are, in comparing them with those of the rest of the world... in our rejoicing over our own progress (we have) not paid sufficient regard to conditions in other countries.*

The July crisis must not be regarded in isolation. It appears in its true light only when seen as a link between Germany's "world policy," as followed since the mid-1890s, and her war aims policy after August 1914.